

**FOSTERING SELF-LOVE: AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF BTS'S UN
SPEECH USING FAIRCLOUGH'S CRITICAL DISCOURSE
THEORY****Najwa Septya Agustien¹, Syarla Salsabilla Fanany²**^{1,2}Swadaya Gunung Jati University, Cirebon, West Java*Corresponding author: najwaseptya2003@gmail.com.**Abstract**

This study applies critical discourse analysis to the public speeches of Kim Namjoon, leader of the K-pop group BTS. The primary objective of this study is to examine how RM strategically employed language in his speech to forge connections between language, ideology, and power. It also seeks to identify linguistic strategies facilitating public persuasion and support for RM's ideas, while exploring the ideological messages embedded in his communication, shedding light on the communicative techniques enhancing the resonance and influence of his message. Fairclough's three-dimensional system adds a crucial layer of analysis to the foundation established by Halliday's functional approach. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a multifaceted approach to examining spoken, written, and visual communication, focusing on how language functions to construct and maintain social power dynamics, propagate ideologies, and perpetuate inequalities. The data was collected from Unicef.org's script of BTS RM's speech at the 73rd United Nations General Assembly. The findings showed that RM's speech adeptly employs linguistic strategies to convey powerful ideological messages, emphasizing self-love and individual development. The cohesive narrative and social involvement with BTS's fan base emphasize their influential role in advocating positive global change.

Keywords: Self Love, Critical Thinking, Critical Discourse Analysis, Speech, Applied Linguistics, Fairclough Theory

INTRODUCTION

We all know that communication is the focal point of human endeavor (Agustien & Mulatsih, 2021.). Speech is deemed as one of the ordinary forms of communication used to transmit certain messages and intent by companies, communities, or anyone who can both instruct and coax the audience (Culpeper, 2021; Fatmah et al., 2024; Kadim, 2022; Saeedi et al., 2025). According to (Rapti & Sapounidis, 2024) by fusing communication skills with critical thinking, someone can make a good, purposeful, and believable speech. As communication and critical thinking continue to shape the language landscape, how can we embed these advances in a way that maximizes their potential to enhance language learning?

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multifaceted language approach to examining spoken, written, and visual communication, critically focusing on how language functions to construct and maintain social power dynamics, propagate ideologies, and perpetuate inequalities (Dang, 2025; Lee & Tran, 2025). It is a technique for critically and analytically studying text, discussion, and communication with a focus on how language can influence and reflect social relations and power structures (Radyuk & Oglu, 2024). CDA seeks to

analyze the language, ideology, and power present in a text, whether written or spoken, and also examines the interconnectedness among these elements (Hasanah et al., 2019; Minkhatunnakhriyah et al., 2021). CDA aims to analyze language used in social or political contexts and uncover the connections between the forces exerted by that language. The CDA is used to address a variety of subjects and problems. It can be applied to examine corporate advertising, political rhetoric, media portrayals of underrepresented groups, educational resources, and many other contexts where language and communication are important. To gain a deeper knowledge of how language affects our world, researchers in CDA work.

Mirroring Halliday's functional analysis (1994, 2004, 2014) which cited in (Fontaine & O'Grady, 2025), Fairclough's discourse system posits a tripartite view of discourse: (i) text (encompassing spoken, written, and visual modalities), (ii) practice (encompassing creation, consumption, and distribution), and (iii) sociocultural context. To analyze text and discourse, Fairclough proposes a three-dimensional framework: (a) linguistic analysis of text's formal features, (b) interpretation of interaction-text relationship, and (c) elucidation of discourse's relation to social and cultural reality (Amoussou et al., 2018). Fairclough (1996) which cited in Rahro et al., (2024) Posits that every instance of language can be categorized as a communicative occurrence, and he argues that evaluating these communicative events and the structure of discourse is an integral part of critically analyzing media discourse. Fairclough (1993), which was cited in Rahro et al. (2024) suggests that the choices made in language usage have consequences for society by shaping and implementing theories, ideologies, beliefs, and strategies, which are ultimately employed to acquire influence and dominance in politics, economics, and society. Various segments and factions within a society possess distinct sets of beliefs, which find expression through language (Gontier, 2025; Moser et al., 2024)

Kim Nam Joon, known as RM, is the leader of BTS, one of the most famous K-Pop stars. RM began his career in 2013, his first stage name was Rap Monster. But, because of some reasons, he changed his stage name to RM. BTS inspires many people around the world with their songs. Their music typically addresses pressing issues in society. One of its songs, namely "*Answer: Love Myself*", expresses the Importance of Self-Love. This song carries a message that can provide support for us to accept our past mistakes so that we can find a path for the future. From this song, we hope to learn and understand everything we need.

On September 24th, 2018, BTS attended the launch of UNICEF's Generation Unlimited Partnership Program at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Generation Unlimited is a global partnership dedicated to increasing opportunities and investments for children and young people aged 10 to 24. Furthermore, BTS collaborated with UNICEF to support a global campaign using the hashtag #ENDviolence, which is focused on combating violence against children and youth worldwide. Not only that, BTS has also made a positive impact on the younger generation through the Love Myself campaign conducted in partnership with UNICEF since October 2017. UNICEF announced through a press release that this campaign has successfully raised approximately 3.6 million U.S. dollars.

Hence, the objective of this study was to qualitatively analyze the structural aspects of RM's speech using Fairclough's '*Three Dimensions*' CDA theory. This study aims to analyze how RM utilized language in his speech to establish connections between language, ideology, and power. Additionally, it seeks to identify the linguistic strategies employed by RM to persuade the public to accept, align with, and support his ideas. Furthermore, the study aims to explore the ideological messages conveyed by RM through his speech, providing insights

into the communicative techniques that contribute to the influence and resonance of his message.

Language, Ideology, and Power

Given the centrality of these issues to applied linguistics, the connection between language, power, and ideology is intricately woven. By integrating critical language awareness (CLA) into heritage language teaching, Beaudrie emphasizes the importance of understanding power dynamics and ideological biases within and between languages. Recognizing power dynamics within languages enables students to navigate the influence of language on societal power structures, fostering a critical awareness of how language can shape and reflect power relations. Additionally, understanding ideological biases between languages allows students to critically examine the inherent perspectives and values embedded in different linguistic expressions, contributing to a more nuanced comprehension of cultural diversity and challenging dominant linguistic norms. This heightened awareness becomes pivotal for students as they engage in a comprehensive exploration of language's role in shaping societal narratives and power dynamics (Beaudrie et al., 2020; Kiramba et al., 2023; Kroskrity, 2025; Vessey & Ajšić, 2025).

To portray the issues of Language in shaping individual identities, either promoting inclusion or perpetuating exclusion within society, Rosendal & Amini Ngabonziza, (2022) and Tajeddin et al. (2023) surpasses its role as a neutral instrument; rather, it emerges as a potent force entwined with power dynamics and ideological agendas. The influence of language extends beyond mere communication, as it contributes significantly to the societal fabric. Its power lies in its ability to mold perceptions, influence social structures, and reflect ideological stances. In essence, language holds a transformative capacity that reverberates throughout the intricate layers of societal dynamics (Applin, 2024; Sengul, 2025; Taylor & Pill, 2025).

The research by Sabrina et al. (2021) provides a significant addition to the academic discourse concerning language, power, and ideology in the era of digital advancements. Through an analysis of the discourse surrounding “PeduliLindungi”, they advocate for a deeper exploration beyond superficial narratives, emphasizing the necessity to scrutinize the inherent power dynamics critically. Their study acts as a plea for attentiveness, underscoring the non-neutrality of language and its capacity to mold our perceptions of technology, impact our conduct, and, fundamentally, either reinforce or challenge established power structures.

Communication, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Speech

To portray the issues of the relationship between Critical Discourse Analysis and Speech Brown (1983), in Wahyuni & Syamsi (2021) noted that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) involves studying speech to understand how language, ideology, and power are interconnected. This approach digs into how language choices either support or challenge existing ideologies and power structures. When analyzing speech in the context of CDA, researchers closely examine linguistic nuances to reveal implicit ideologies present in the discourse. The analysis goes beyond surface meanings, aiming to uncover the intricate web of power relations and the ideological underpinnings that shape communication practices and interpretations. By examining how speech contributes to maintaining or challenging dominant ideologies, CDA enables us to better understand how language serves as a tool for expressing and negotiating power.

Given the centrality of these issues to Communication and Language Molina et al., (2025), stated that Language is not a neutral tool for conveying information; instead, it wields a

significant influence in molding our perceptions of the world, upholding established power dynamics, and advocating specific ideologies. Meanwhile, Communication is not a simple reflection of pre-existing realities; rather, it actively contributes to shaping the very fabric of reality itself. It serves as a means of preserving societal order, influencing our thoughts and behaviors through ideology, and manifesting power in our day-to-day experiences. Furthermore, language is utilized to establish prevailing narratives that reinforce ideologies. Through controlling the language employed in discussions of social issues, influential groups can manipulate public perception and sustain their dominance (Heliasz-Nowosielska et al., 2025).

Language goes beyond being a mere communication tool, it serves as a crucial force in forging and sustaining power dynamics and ideologies (Fairclough, 2003) which cited in Fairclough argues that language is not just a means of communication but a central force that binds and maintains power and ideology. According to his perspective, language serves as a medium for social interaction and the construction of meaning. The utilization of language is molded by societal and cultural norms, which, in turn, is influenced by power dynamics and ideological frameworks. Language, in Fairclough's analysis, serves as a nuanced tool that not only mirrors existing power dynamics, but actively participates in their construction, making it essential to scrutinize linguistic choices for their implicit ideological implications. Fairclough's exploration of language as a social practice calls for a heightened awareness of how linguistic expressions, influenced by power and ideology, shape our understanding of the world and contribute to the maintenance or transformation of societal structures (Taylor & Pill, 2025).

In the realm of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Fairclough delves into how language contributes to the perpetuation and reinforcement of social hierarchies and power relations. He posits that language is a potent tool for the creation and consolidation of dominant ideologies, simultaneously silencing alternative perspectives and marginalizing specific groups. Within his Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, Fairclough delves into the nuanced ways language is employed to perpetuate and sustain social hierarchies and power relations. His analysis contends that language functions as a tool for the construction and fortification of dominant ideologies. Fairclough's perspective extends to the recognition that language, when wielded strategically, not only reinforces the prevailing ideologies but also acts as a mechanism for suppressing dissenting perspectives and marginalizing specific societal groups. This dual role of language becomes a key focal point in understanding its role in shaping social dynamics.

Fairclough underscores the significance of language in shaping our perceptions of reality. With language, we not only establish but also fortify social constructs and hierarchies, such as those related to gender, race, and class. These constructs, in a cyclical manner, shape our comprehension of the world and influence our interactions with others. Fairclough's theoretical framework underscores the substantial influence of language on shaping our perceptions of reality, emphasizing that language plays an active role in shaping our cognitive processes and constructing our understanding of the world. In this context, Fairclough posits that individuals, through their language use, play an active role in the creation and reinforcement of social constructs and hierarchies (Bai & Rosenwald, 2023; Razmeh, 2024).

Based on this, the research will focus on the way RM employs language to establish connections between language, ideology, and power in his speech, the kinds of linguistic strategies that RM use to persuade the public to accept, occur with, and support his ideas,

and the ideological messages that RM convey through his speech. This research yields valuable recommendations on linguistic constructions, particularly concerning gender, race, and class, become influential frameworks that shape not only personal perspectives but also interactions within society.

METHOD

Researchers used Fairclough's three-dimensional framework to analyze data consisting of a script of BTS RM's speech at the 73rd United Nations General Assembly. To collect the data, the researcher first watched the speech video at <https://youtu.be/oTe4f-bBEKg?si=6AkdZ6jf1IPAi371>. For the second step, the researcher searched for the script using the website <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/we-have-learned-love-ourselves-so-now-i-urge-you-speak-yourself>. On the third step, the researcher read the script, and in the last step, the researcher analyzed it using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework. This study uses a qualitative data analysis method, adapted from the approach of Miles, Matthew B, A. Michael Huberman, (1994), as used by Wahyuni & Syamsi, (2021) in their study on the speeches of Nadiem Makarim and Muhadjir Effendy

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of RM's speech, considering textual elements, discursive practices, and social practices. Offering deep insights into the linguistic methods used to express ideological messages and create links between language, ideology, and power.

A. Textual Elements

Textual elements are essential components of a text that can be used to convey meaning, purpose, and the identity of the author or speaker. According to Haapaniemi (2023), Textual elements encompass both the linguistic components, such as words, phrases, clauses, and sentences, and the visual aspects, including fonts, colors, and layout, within a text. These elements collectively represent the tangible expressions of meaning in the text (Aarts & Wallis, 2025; Philip, 2025)

1) Narrative

Data 1

"I was born in Ilsan, a city near Seoul, South Korea. It's a beautiful place, with a lake, hills, and even an annual flower festival. I spent a happy childhood there, and I was just an ordinary boy."

In the first statement, RM unfolds a vivid narrative about his hometown, Ilsan, near Seoul, South Korea. By describing its scenic features and recalling his happy childhood, he establishes a foundational textual element that sets the stage for a personal story. This narrative structure not only serves to connect the audience with his background but also initiates a chronological unfolding of his experiences.

Data 2

"In an intro to one of our early albums, there is a line that says, 'My heart stopped...' I was maybe nine or ten."

The second statement delves into BTS's musical history through an intro in one of their early albums. RM's mention of a line that says, "My heart stopped..." at the age of nine or ten introduces a textual element that

intertwines personal history with the group's musical journey. This textual layer enriches the speech by embedding the audience in the collective memories of BTS, showcasing a deeper layer of their artistic evolution.

Data 3

“After releasing the ‘Love Yourself’ albums and launching the ‘Love Myself’ campaign, we started to hear remarkable stories from our fans all over the world, how our message helped them overcome their hardships in life and start loving themselves. These stories constantly remind us of our responsibility.”

The third statement marks a progression in the narrative, focusing on the impact of BTS's "Love Yourself" albums and the associated "Love Myself" campaign. RM highlights how the global fanbase shared stories of overcoming hardships, emphasizing the group's evolving mission. This textual element becomes a crucial thread weaving through the speech, demonstrating a continuous narrative evolution grounded in their collective experiences and responsibilities.

2) Expressive Language

Data 1

“Like most people, I made many mistakes in my life.”

In the first expressive statement, RM establishes a relatable connection by acknowledging shared human experiences. The phrase "Like most people" showcases self-awareness, fostering a connection with the audience through the acknowledgment of common mistakes in life. This use of expressive language creates a bridge between the speaker and the listeners, establishing a sense of shared humanity.

Data 2

“I have many faults and I have many fears, but I am going to embrace myself as hard as I can, and I’m starting to love myself, little by little.”

The second expressive statement amplifies the textual element associated with self-acceptance. RM openly admits to having faults and fears, employing expressive language to convey vulnerability. The determination to "embrace myself as hard as I can" reflects a commitment to self-acceptance, fostering authenticity. The gradual journey of "starting to love myself, little by little" reinforces a positive tone, emphasizing the ongoing process of self-love as a transformative and empowering experience.

B. Discursive Practice

Discursive practice is the interplay of language and the social context in meaning-making. According to Nowicka-Franczak (2021), discursive practice is the use of language to construct and shape meaning. It is a way of producing and disseminating knowledge, values, and beliefs. Discursive practices can be used to legitimate power, marginalize certain groups, and promote particular ideologies (Alharbi & Rucker, 2023; Jin & Tay, 2025; Wang & Zheng, 2024).

Data 1

"I would look up at the night sky in wonder and dream the dreams of a boy. I used to imagine that I was a superhero, saving the world."

The first statement in the discursive practice unfolds a narrative of RM's childhood dreams and aspirations. By describing how he used to gaze at the night sky and envision himself as a superhero, RM initiates a discourse on innocence and the imaginative world of a young boy. This discursive practice introduces a thematic layer that reflects on the formative years of his life, highlighting the purity of childhood dreams.

Data 2

"I stopped looking up at the stars at night. I stopped daydreaming."

The second statement marks a significant shift in discourse as RM openly acknowledges ceasing to look up at the stars and daydream. This admission creates a discourse about the evolution of perspectives, symbolizing a transition from the carefree days of youth to a more grounded present. This shift becomes a pivotal element in understanding RM's personal growth and the changing dynamics of his worldview.

Data 3

"There was a small voice in me that said, 'Wake up, man, and listen to yourself!' But it took me a long time to hear music calling my name."

The third statement introduces a discourse centered on introspection and personal transformation. RM's revelation about a "small voice" urging self-awareness and the struggle to heed it initiates a discourse on inner reflection. This narrative layer delves into the complexities of personal change and the challenges associated with aligning one's life with inner calling, providing insights into RM's journey of self-discovery.

Data 4

"But I am still an ordinary, twenty-four-year-old guy. If there's anything that I've achieved, it was only possible because I had my other BTS members by my side, and because of the love and support of our ARMY fans."

The fourth statement intricately weaves a discourse on identity, solidarity, and collective support. RM acknowledges his ordinary nature and attributes any achievements to the presence of his fellow BTS members and the unwavering support from their fanbase, ARMY. This discourse emphasizes the interconnectedness within the group, illustrating the importance of collaboration and the symbiotic relationship with their fans, enriching the narrative with themes of unity and collective success.

Data 5

"I'm Kim Nam Jun, RM of BTS. I'm a hip-hop idol and an artist from a small town in Korea."

The final statement self-identifies RM as "Kim Nam Jun, RM of BTS," and emphasizes his role as a hip-hop idol from a small town in Korea. This creates a discourse on cultural identity and selfhood, shedding light on how RM

perceives himself within the broader context of both the music industry and his cultural background. The statement invites reflection on the complexities of navigating identity while being part of a global phenomenon like BTS.

C. Social Practice

Social practice is the dynamic interplay between individuals and social norms, routines, and patterns of behavior. Johnson & McLean (2019) argues that social practice refers to the ways in which people use language in everyday life to interact with each other and make sense of the world around them. It encompasses the norms, conventions, and routines that shape how we use language to communicate, socialize, and accomplish tasks (Cintrón-Gutiérrez, 2022; Yuan & Jiang, 2021).

Data 1

“Last November, BTS launched the ‘Love Myself’ campaign with UNICEF, building on our belief that ‘true love first begins with loving myself.’ We have been partnering with UNICEF’s #ENDviolence program to protect children and young people all over the world from violence.”

The first statement establishes a profound social practice by highlighting BTS's involvement in the "Love Myself" campaign with UNICEF. This discourse emphasizes the group's commitment to addressing global issues, specifically protecting children and young people from violence. It portrays BTS as advocates for positive social change, intertwining their music with a broader mission to make a meaningful impact on a global scale.

Data 2

“Our fans have become a major part of this campaign with their action and enthusiasm. We truly have the best fans in the world!”

The second statement contributes to a social practice discourse by acknowledging the active role of BTS fans (ARMY) in the "Love Myself" campaign. By describing fans as a major part of the initiative, BTS fosters a sense of collaboration and mutual dependence between the artists and their fanbase. This discourse underlines the collective effort in championing social causes, portraying a shared commitment to making a positive difference.

Data 3

“We started to hear remarkable stories from our fans all over the world, how our message helped them overcome their hardships in life and start loving themselves.”

The third statement reinforces a social practice by highlighting the transformative impact of BTS's message on fans worldwide. By sharing stories of how their music helped individuals overcome hardships and embrace self-love, BTS emphasizes a positive social narrative. This discourse portrays the group not only as musicians but as catalysts for positive change, showcasing the profound influence they have on the well-being and mindset of their global audience.

The analysis of RM's speech reveals a skillful use of linguistics strategies to convey ideological messages and establish connections between language, ideology, and power. Regarding textual elements, RM employed personal stories, including his childhood aspirations and challenges, establishing a connection with the audience that is both relatable and emotionally impactful. The utilization of storytelling as a linguistic approach eased the conveyance of the central message focused on self-love and individual development.

Within the domain of discursive practices, RM's use of narrative structure facilitated a cohesive and compelling presentation of ideas. Through the sharing of personal experiences and the emphasis on the transformative influence of self-love, he framed BTS as artists conveying a substantial message, adding the ongoing conversation about mental health and self-acceptance. The practice of weaving personal narrative into broader themes illustrated a thoughtful linguistic strategy for effectively delivering impactful messages.

The aspect of social practice revealed cooperative initiatives involving BTS, UNICEF, and their fan base (ARMY). Through the incorporation of fans into the "Love Myself" campaign, RM underscored a united mission, nurturing a feeling of community and shared empowerment. This social practice not only harmonized with the central theme of self-love but also showcased the influential role that BTS and their fans play in promoting positive change globally.

CONCLUSION

RM's speech is a powerful example of how language can be used to convey ideological messages and connect language, ideology, and power. This study used Fairclough's "three-dimensional" critical discourse analysis (CDA) theory for analyzing structural aspects of speech. Research revealed that RM skillfully used linguistic strategies, such as personal storytelling, to convey impactful messages about self-love and individual development. He also used narrative structure to frame BTS as artists with a substantial message on mental health. In addition to linguistic strategies, RM's speech also incorporated social practice. The "Love Myself" campaign, which involves BTS, UNICEF, and their fan base (ARMY), is a cooperative initiative that emphasizes community and shared empowerment. This social practice not only harmonizes with the central theme of self-love but also showcases the influential role that BTS and their fans play in promoting positive global change.

Moreover, RM strategically employs personal storytelling in his speech to establish a profound emotional bond and to humanize the BTS members, eroding traditional barriers between celebrities and their audience. Through the incorporation of narrative structures that shed light on mental health issues, RM not only plays a role in destigmatizing these concerns but positions BTS as socially conscious artists, leveraging their platform to tackle urgent societal challenges. The "Love Myself" campaign, functioning as a social practice, goes beyond mere rhetoric by exemplifying concrete collaborative efforts with UNICEF and the ARMY community to effect meaningful change. This joint initiative not only resonates with the core theme of self-love but also underscores the potential of popular culture and fan communities to contribute to positive global transformations. In essence, RM's speech stands as a testament to the intricate interplay between language, ideology, and power, illustrating how intentional discourse can act as a catalyst for personal and societal metamorphosis.

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